

200 years

sitting over this white sheet
sober at 4 p.m. in the afternoon,
I received a letter from a poet this morning
telling me that I was one of the most
important writers of the last
200 years.

well, now, one needn't believe that
especially if one has felt as I have
this past month,
walking about,
thinking,
surely I am going crazy,
and then thinking,
I can't write
anymore.

then I think of the factories
the production lines
the warehouses
the timeclocks,
overtime and layoffs
and flirtations with the Mexican girls
on the soldering line...
everything was handled for one,
there was always something to do,
there was more than enough to do,
and if you didn't keep up,
if you weren't clever and swift and
obedient
you were out with the sparrows and
the bums.

writing's different, you're laying out in the
white air, you're hanging from the wire,
you're sitting in a tree and they're getting at
the trunk with an electric
saw...

there's no silk scarf about one's neck,
no English accents,
no checks from aristocratic ladies in Europe
with blind and impotent
husbands...

it's more like a hockey game
or putting on the gloves with a man
50 pounds heavier and ten years
younger, or
it's like steering a ship through fog

while a mad damsel sucks at your
left ball.

and all along you know you've gotten away
with some tricks, quite obvious stuff that
you've been given immense credit for.
that you either wrote off-hand or
hardly meant or hardly cared
for.

well, it helps to be
lucky.

yet, in reverse, you have sometimes done
it as if you always knew how it was to be
properly done, and you knew it was there
and you knew that you were there
and that you had done it better,
in a way,
than anybody in a long time
or
than anybody about, and
you allowed yourself to feel
good about it
for a very short
time.

they put the strain on you
with statements about 200 years,
and when only one says it, that's all
right
but when 2 or 3 or 4 say it --
that's when they tend to lay you open for the
kookoo bin.
they tell you to give up cigarettes and
booze, and then they tell you that you
have 25 more years of good production and
then
ten years to loll about in your old
age
to suck upon
carrots, rewards and
memories.

Patchen's gone, we need you, man.
we all need you for our typewriter ribbons
and that feeling just above the
bellybutton --
knowing you are in some small room in
West Pasadena killing
flies with a torn
flyswatter.

they can kill you,
the praisers can kill you,
the young girls can kill you,
the blue-eyed boys in English I
who send warm letters
hand-written
on lined paper
can kill you,
and they're right:
2 packs a day and the bottle
can kill you
too.

of course,
anything can kill you
and something eventually
will. all I can say is that
today
I have just inserted a new
typewriter ribbon
into this old machine
and I am pleased with the way it
works. that makes for more than just an
ordinary day, thank
you.

finish

it's all over, she says,
laying on top of me,
it's all over, I can feel that it's
all over.

it is 11 a.m. and the sun is coming
through the curtains and in the upper left
corner of the room
a red spider builds a new
web.

you've got all these women primed,
she says,
you laying around on their beds and
smoking cigarettes and talking about
books and music, Virginia Woolf and
Bach and all that
shit.

but they don't kiss like I do, she continues,
they kiss like this...